Information about medicinal plants for treatment

@*245. SHRI BRAHMKUMAR BHATT: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that tribal community have the knowledge and information about medicinal plants and shrubs which can cure many diseases, including AIDS:

(b) whether a seminar and a workshop on management of incurable diseases like AIDS were conducted recently, as reported in the Times of India dated 6th February, 1999, Ahmedabad edition, under the caption, 'Seminar on Medicinal Plants to be held at Sputara';

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether Government are extending cooperation to encourage the tribal people having knowledge in this regard; and

(e) if so, what incentives would be given to them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI DALIT EZHILMALAI): (a) to (e) A statement is laid on the table of the House.

(a) It is a fact that tribal communities have the knowledge and information about the use of Medicinal Plants and shrubs for various diseases. However, no scientifically proved claim has come to notice regarding the treatment of AIDS.

(b) and (c) Yes, Sir.

A National Seminar on Medicinal Plants & Traditional Medical Knowledge and a National Workshop on Traditional Knowledge and Management of Incurable Diseases like AIDS was organized on 12th and 13th February, 1999 at Saputara in Dangs Distt. (Gujarat). It was organized by the department of Health & Family Welfare, Department of Forest & Environment, Department of Tribal Development Corporation of Government of Gujarat in collaboration with the Gujarat Ayurved University, Jamnager. At this Seminar, about 60 speakers of different disciplines presented papers on the follwing topics:—

1. Present status on Medico-Botanical Wealth & Traditional knowledge in Gujarat.

2. Assessment of Medicinal Plants requirement by the Pharmaceutical Industry.

3. Intellectual property right in relation to utilization of medicinal plants and their products.

4. Assessment of export potential of medicinal plants.

5. Evolving suitable strategies for conservation and regeneration of threatened and over exploited medicinal plants.

In the workshop, the role of Ayurveda and other traditional medicine was discussed on intractable diseases such as AIDS, Cancer, Diabetes, Rheumatoid Arthritis, etc.

(d) and (e) As a first step, efforts have been initiated to document and publish tribal medical claims.

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA: Sir, I had raised a question regarding the Indian System of Medicine and Homoeopathy. I did not put this question just to listen from the hon Minister, "No, Sir" and "do not arise". Why have I raised this question? Sir, I will take one minute. Sir, in India herbals are being used for the last 5,000 years. Three out of four persons in the country use herbals and medicines. There are 40,000 licence holder practitioners. In the world market, herbal products account for 14.2 billion dollars.....

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ramoowalia, your question is, "Whether it is a fact

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that an institution named national Board on Medicinal Plants has been constituted recently". He said, "No".

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA: Sir, I am asking.....

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let me tell you one thing. What you are asking does not pertain to this question because he has said that no institution has been named. Parts (b) and (c) arise from the same question. You are talking something else. *(Interruptions)*.

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA: Sir, I am preparing a ground for.....

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. Question Hour is not for preparing a ground. You have to put a specific question. You prepare your ground when you speak on some other issue later, not in Question Hour. You have no question. *(Interruptions)*. You have no question. Shri Brahmakumar Bhatt.

SHRI BRAHMAKUMAR BHATT: Sir, when there was a national seminar on ayurvedic medicines and plants on a large base in the district of Dang in Gujarat, I would like to know whether the officers of the Government of India participated in it or not. Secondly, is the hon. Minister aware that in the Nadiad town in the State of Gujarat, at least 25 foreign patients have admitted themselves in a hospital as indoor patients, and that patients are coming from Germany, Europe, England and America? In view of the interest shown by the foreigners in Ayurvedic medicines, what research and development activity is the Government doing to encourage Ayurvedic medicines in this country, the country which has been working on Ayurvedic medicines for hundreds of years? What research work is the Government doing and how much money is being spent by them on this?

SHRI DALIT EZHILMALAI: Sir, in fact, the Conference, which our hon. Member is talking about, was organised by the Gujarat Government. The Health Minister of Gujarat, Shri Ashok Bhatt, had organised that Conference. It is a fact that the tribal community have knowledge, they have information, about this. The ground was prepared by the State Government, and, accordingly, that Conference was held. A large number of delegates, more than the expectation of the organisers, attended that Conference. From the Government of India side, the Secretary in the Department of Indian Systems of Medicine of Homeopathy of Ministry of Health participated in that Conference. On our side, we did finance that Conference to the extent of two lakhs of rupees. And, there was a great deal of encouragement in that Conference where more than 60 papers were presented, and on research and other activities, we have 3000 or more claims collected in the Ministry which have to be compiled and studied. The research institutes in the ISM, CCRE and CCRU are engaged in this work. We have also proposed to extend financial support given to the Central Council of Scientific Research to the tune of Rs. 25 crores for this year for their research work in this field. Information, research, studies, everything is going on well with the projects and with the people who are involved in them. As the hon. Member said, the Western world has been showing great interest in recent times in this traditional system of medicine in our country. In order to develop medicinal plants the Government of India has set up a Committee headed by a most well-known person. Dr. D.N. Tiwari member, Planning Commission to give a proposal for setting up of a National Board for Medicinal plant. That Committee is now considering all the aspects so as to make this move a successful one.

DR. KARAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, sir, the reply of the Minister seems to give an impression as if this work on medicinal plants and herbs is new. This work, in fact, has been going on for many decades. There has been research work in Indian medicinal plants, and I

would urge upon the hon. Minister to tell the House what he is doing in order to try and bring together all the research that has taken place in the regional research laboratories around the country, particularly, with a view to patenting some of these herbs and research results. Otherwise, what is happening is that Western companies are coming in, taking our herbs, and are trying to patent them and use them there.

A Board may not have been set up, but a great deal of work has been done. Is the Minister aware of the tremendous work that has been done; and what steps is he taking to ensure that this work reaches some kind of logical conclusion.

SHRI DALIT EZHILMALAI: Thanks to the hon. Member, who is a former Health Minister. Sir, just recently, on the 1st of December, 1998, we set up a committee headed by Dr. D.N. Tiwari, who is very committed and doing very good work in this field, parrticularly, in the Indian Systems of Medicines. He has a group of experts in the Committee. The Government has also entrusted to this Committee the job of proposing a team of experts who would constitute a Board, which will be entrusted with the work of taking care of the existing knowledge that hon. Member, Dr. Karan Singh, has mentioned. I hope we will be able to meet the expectations of the hon. Member in this regard. Of course so far as the Indian System of Medicine is concerned, we have got patented 18 Ayurvedic medicines so far--Ayush 64, 56, 82 and so on, for malaria epilepsy and diabetes. So, these things have already been developed by our Central Research Councils. After this board comes into being, we are hopeful of doing a little better in this respect.

SHRIMATI URMILABEN CHIMANBHAI PATEL: Sir, in view of the great awareness and demand for herbal medicines at the national and international level, what steps have been taken to encourage plantation of medicinal plants and to develop Ayurvedic pharmacies? Secondly, what steps has the Government taken to get herbal medicines patented? We know that the Western countries tried to patent a simple herb like *neem*, which is found mostly in India and some other tropical countries. So also was the case with *tulsi* and some other herbs. So, what steps has the Government taken to get our herbal medicines patented? Finally, what have we done to encourage and develop international market for our herbal medicines?

SHRI DALIT EZHILMALAI: Sir, we have some schemes of giving grants-in-aid to undergraduate colleges for undertaking cultivation of herbal medicines. Land has also been acquired and it is being developed for the purpose. Schemes for development of agro-techniques for cultivation of medicinal plants are also being taken up. We have requested certain Ministries, like, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, to earmark areas in certain forest lands for growing medicinal plants.

SHRIMATI URMILABEN CHIMANBHAI PATEL: What are the funds that have been allotted?

SHRI DALIT EZHILMALAI: We have also requested them to provide a separate budget for growing medicinal plants and to club it under non-timber forest produce, as is done at present. The Ministry of Agriculture has been requested to earmark separate grants-in-aid for growing medicinal plants and not to club it with aromatic plants. The Department of Biotechnology has agreed for the storage of medicinal plants in its gene banks.

This list has been provided to the Department also. A patent Cell has been set up in the Department. The department of Family Welfare has introduced a scheme for providing assistance upto Rs. 1 crore for cultivation of medicinal plants on large tracks of land, about 3,000 to 5,000 hectares. This assistance is given to a society to be registered by the State Governments. So far, one project of

Himachal Pradesh Government has already been sanctioned. The Department of Family Welfare has also a plan to provide assistance up to Rs. 15 lakhs per year to NGOs, per district for 3—5 years. for improving awareness and availability.

As far as patenting is concerned, this was discussed in the Health Minister's Conference of the South-East Asian Region, held recently in the Capital. In that Conference, a closer interaction as well as collaboration on exchange of this know-how between the Asian countries has been broadly agreed to. Considering the western interest in the native system, we are evolving ways as to how we can make it advantageous to our country.

SHRIMATI URMILABEN CHIMANBHAI PATEL: Sir, the answer of the hon. Minister is not clear.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is all right. Prof. M. Sankaralingam.

PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM: Mr. Chairman, Sir, in reply to part (a) of the question, the hon. Minister has said that tribal communities have the knowledge of medicinal plants and its utilisation. If so, what is the plan of the Government to untilise their knowledge for making efficient herbal medicines?

SHRI DALIT EZHILMALAI: Sir, the Government is supporting these traditional people who have the knowledge of herbs and plants. we give them support in cash and kind. In those areas, conferences and seminars are organised so that these people are brought together and discussion held collectively. We also send our representatives there to share the knowledge as well as how to harness and keep it. The co-operation of the tribal communities from several parts of the country is very much encouraging. They are now coming closer to share the traditional information with the Government agencies.

SHRI ADHIK SHIRODKAR: Sir, it is well-known that allopathic medicienes have tremendous side-effects, besides being costly, while the medicines from plants, like Ayurvedic and Unani, have no side-effects, and are cheap. Would the Government consider having a seminar of the manufacturers of these medicines, both Ayurvedic and Unani, so that a strategy can be evolved to popularise this and the common man may be benefited? Would the Government consider, after having assimilated this information of patenting them, before the foreigners do so, as has been done with turmeric and neem?

SHRI ASHOK MITRA: Since you have supported the Patents Bill the foreigners will come.

SHRI ADHIK SHIRODKAR: Sir, he is supplementing my question.

SHRI ASHOK MITRA: Don't complain now.

SHRI DALIT EZHILMALAI: We certainly agree to the suggestions offered by the hon. Member. We, in the Ministry, not only associate ourselves with it, but we are very much concerned about the costly treatment that is available in the allopathic system. On the other hand, we have a very cheap and accessible medicinal system with us for generations now. We participate in the conferences organised by the ayurvedic people, homoeopathic people as well as the traditional healers who are doing a great service in our rural areas. These are the people who extend their medical care to the countryside. Therefore, we, in the Health Ministry are supporting this type of coming together and helping these conferences and seminars on traditional medicinal system.

246[The Questioner (Shri Gopal Sinh G. Solanki) was absent. For answer,* vide *Col. 31 infra]*

247[The Questioner (Miss Frida Topno) was absent. For answer,* vide *Col. 32 infra]*